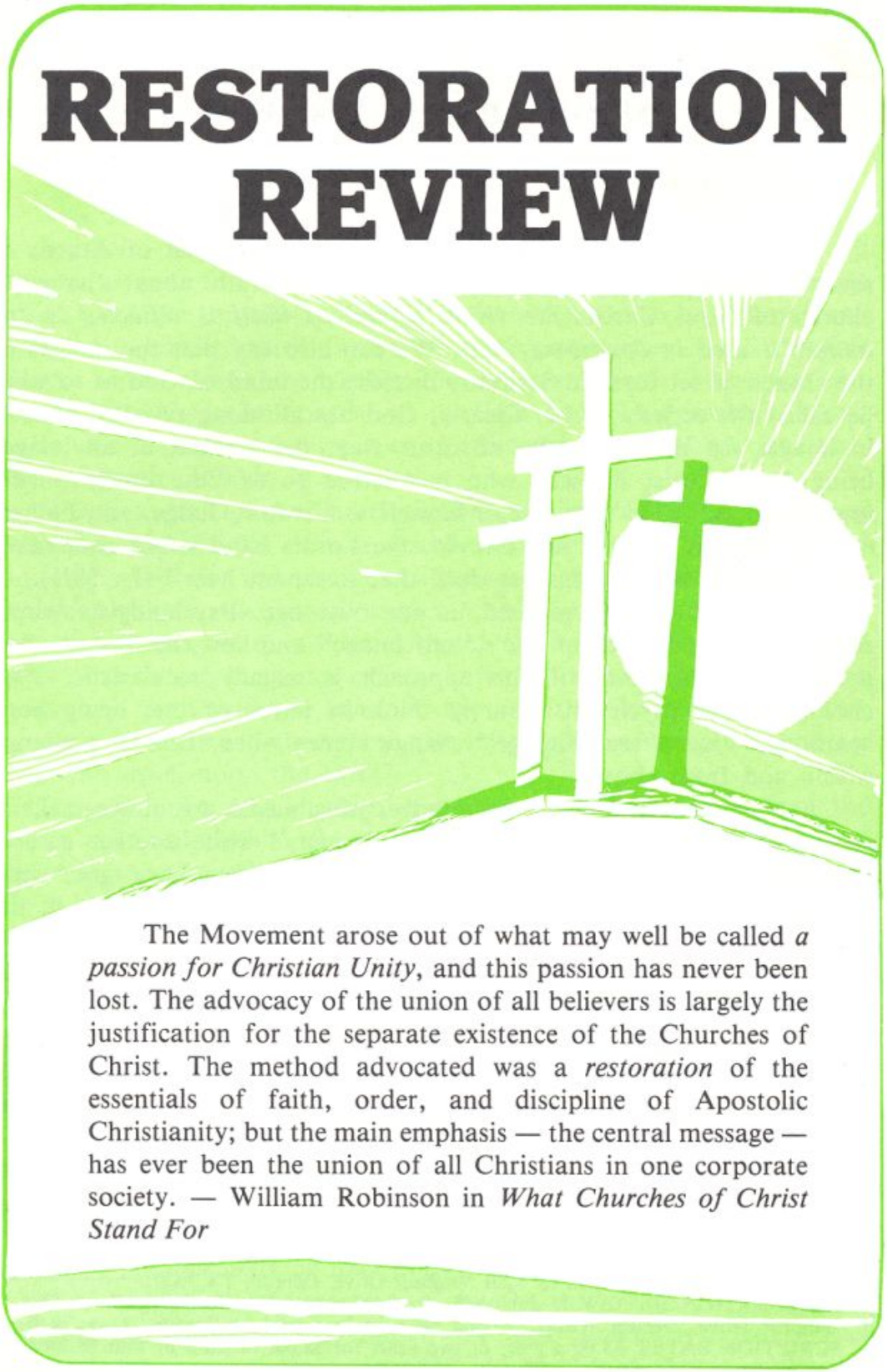
RESTORATION REVIEW



The Movement arose out of what may well be called *a passion for Christian Unity*, and this passion has never been lost. The advocacy of the union of all believers is largely the justification for the separate existence of the Churches of Christ. The method advocated was a *restoration* of the essentials of faith, order, and discipline of Apostolic Christianity; but the main emphasis — the central message — has ever been the union of all Christians in one corporate society. — William Robinson in *What Churches of Christ Stand For*

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The Adventures of the Early Church . . .

IMAGES OF THE ECCLESIA

Speech is the image of our actions. — Solon

That pungent line, spoken by one of the wise men of Athens in seventh century B.C., captures an important truth about the early church of Jesus Christ: *the vision it had of itself is reflected in the images it used in describing itself.* We can also say that the images of the church as set forth in Scripture disclose the mind of God as to what he called the ecclesia to be. Clearly, God has all along revealed himself in images for there is really no other way, the greatest of all images being Jesus Christ himself, who is referred to as "the image of the invisible God." God also reveals himself as Creator, Judge, and Father, as well as such imagery as "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear" (Is. 59:1).

Solon's wisdom is realized in our own age. Psychologists wisely refer to the importance of one's "self image" and how that image often needs upgrading, even if the approach is usually secularistic. Psychologists and psychiatrists rarely think in terms of one being born again, and that a real "image" change comes when there is a change within and from above.

At a more simplistic level the advertising media are image makers. A soft drink ad invites you to "Be a Pepper," while another assures you that "Things go Better with Coke." Millions have gone into creating the image of "the Marlboro man," and while they deny it, the tobacco industry is seeking to entice young people with that image.

Political images are especially interesting. Russia is likened unto a bear while the United States is an eagle, an image that President Eisenhower did not like since the eagle is a predator. Benjamin Franklin wanted the turkey as the American emblem, but who wants to be a turkey? Word images like democracy and republic are meaningful, and I agree with President Kennedy that the United States should think of herself as a republic rather than a democracy. Politicians themselves create images. If President Reagan is "the great communicator," the prime minister of Britain is "the iron lady."

Images! They are the stuff of life. Poets have spoken of lost lives and shattered dreams in terms of broken images, as did T. S. Eliot in *The Waste Land.*

You know only a heap of broken images, where the sun beats,
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,
And the dry stone no sound of water.

In their image of themselves the early Christians had no such concepts as are often current in modern theology, such as the "visible church" and the "invisible church," or even "the church militant" and "the church triumphant." In the New Testament there is no invisible church, which makes the visible church meaningless. There was the ecclesia, God's community, in all its flesh and blood reality — real people who could be sought out and persecuted. They did not see themselves as being invisible in any sense.

Nor is there the church triumphant in the New Testament, even though we do have the ecclesia described as the city of God in Revelation. It is always the church militant — the pilgrim church, the witnessing church, the praying church, the persecuted church. Even the saints that have gone on are not as much "triumphant" as they are still a part of the struggle against evil upon the earth, as in Rev. 6:10 where the martyrs for Christ are heard to cry out, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before thou wilt judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell upon the earth?

They did not even distinguish between the local ecclesia and the church universal. While Paul would clearly refer to the church in general in some contexts, as in 1 Cor. 12:28: "God has appointed in the church first apostles," and to a single congregation in others, as in 1 Cor. 1:2: "To the church of God which is at Corinth," there was no *practical* distinction. No congregation saw itself as but a part of the universal church. They rather saw the local ecclesia as the (universal) church in a given community, and I use parenthesis because they simply did not think in terms of universal and local. There was simply God's community, whether in many places or one place. The church at Corinth *(not* the Corinthian church!) *was* the ecclesia of God in its completeness. In Corinth "the temple of God" that was filled with God's Spirit and assembled in the name of Christ represented the (universal) church in that city. They were the Body of Christ in assembly, not just part of that Body.

The multiplicity of images used by the early believers goes far in revealing the nature of the church. We have already referred to such images as community, Body, temple, and the list is almost endless. In various ways the ecclesia is likened unto a family or household (even a *spiritual* house in 1 Pet. 2:5), an elect race, a holy nation, and a royal

priesthood (l Pet. 2:5, 9). It is also likened to a pilgrim community (l Pet. 2: II), a colony of heaven (Philip. 3:20, a peculiar or possessed people (Tit. 2:14), and as the people of God (l Pet. 2:10).

There is the image of the vine and the branches (In. 15:1-8), the assembly of first-born ones (Heb. 12:23), the olive tree (Rom. 11:17), and even as the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29). Some think the ecclesia is called "the Israel of God" in Gal. 6:19, but I doubt if the Scriptures ever equate the church with Israel. In that verse the apostle could be greeting both believers in Christ *and* his fellow Jews. But Jas. 1:1 does refer to believers who really "belong to Israel."

So, many of the images are drawn from the Old Testament. Even the Greek term *ecclesia* was first used of the church of Moses in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). There was the tabernacle in the wilderness but the church is the true tabernacle (Heb. 8:2), just as it is God's temple in a more important sense than was the temple in the Old Testament (1 Cor. 3:16). Moreover, the ecclesia is the Messianic community, founded not by man's initiative but by the redemptive act of God.

There are at least four propositions that can be drawn from these images, and these point to the true nature of the church. These are marks of the true church, wherever that church may be all around the world.

1. *The ecclesia is one and can never be divided.*

Take the images one by one and they all point to the essential unity of the church. While the images may all reflect variety and diversity, oneness is an incontrovertible characteristic. "There are many members," Paul advises, "but only one Body." So with all the images. There are many branches, but only one vine. There are many "living" stones and of various shapes, but they are built into but one house.

This is why we cannot really speak of a *divided* church. If Christ cannot be divided, then his Body cannot be splintered into sects. So the apostle argues. Sects therefore cannot be the church, though the church (believers) may be scattered among the sects. But still the ecclesia is one, made up of all who are in Christ. The church's unity is real, though not yet realized.

2. *The ecclesia is called of God to be saints and is therefore holy.*

The images abundantly reflect that “the church might be presented before him in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Eph. 5:27). So the church is God’s shekinah that first dwelt in the tabernacle and the temple. God’s church is God’s dwelling place upon earth. In seeing themselves as God’s temple, the early believers saw themselves as called to holiness. (1 Cor. 3:16-17 presents the most exciting image of all: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.” And that was said to a very imperfect assembly of believers.

The church is not only called to be holy but it is holy. Anyone who seeks to destroy God’s purpose in creating a holy people is in danger of being destroyed. The image of believers as priests in God’s temple will help us recover the reality of holiness. Heb. 12:14 says without such holiness no one will see the Lord. That must be what Rom 8:9 is saying: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.” These passages show the relationship between holiness, which is necessary for fellowship with God, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

3. *The ecclesia is catholic or universal.*

The book of Revelation is rich in imagery of the church, and the universality of the church is especially stressed. The true church roll is inscribed in “the book of life” (Rev. 3:5), the victorious ones shall eat of “the tree of life which is in the paradise of God” (Rev. 2:7), they will receive “the crown of life” (Rev. 2:9) and they will be given a white stone with a new name written on it (Rev. 2:17), and they will be made pillars in the temple of God (Rev. 3:12). These are transcending images in that they reach beyond time, place, age, race, and nationality. The images make it clear that *whoever wills* may be a pillar, wear a crown, and eat of the tree of life.

The catholicity of the ecclesia comes through loud and clear in Rev. 7. John first sees the sealing of the 144,000 from the twelve tribes of Israel, but then he sees “a great multitude” which could not be numbered. They were from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues. The book ends with an invitation from the catholic ecclesia: “The Spirit and the Bride say, ‘Come.’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come.’ And let him who is thirsty come, let him who desires take the water of life without price” (Rev. 22:17).

There is God’s grace overflowing the book of Revelation, and how gracious those words *Let him who desires take the water of life without price.* The invitation is color blind. It embraces all nations and all peoples.

Catholicity also implies equality. Not only may all come but they may all come on equal basis. And they have an equal relationship. The image of believers as "living stones" in 2 Pet. 2:5 points this up, for while the stones that make up the spiritual structure are of various shapes and forms they are all equal. An Illinois paper carried this announcement: "Normal boy marries Oblong girl." Stones are like that, with some square-like and some oblong and some triangular. Most may be "normal," but many are roughly-hued and a few finely cut and highly polished. But all are equal. Thank God that he did not make us bricks, all formed and stamped exactly alike! Universality always implies diversity.

4. *The ecclesia is apostolic.*

Some of the images point to the fact that the ecclesia grew out of biblical tradition. The church was both the creation and the creator of Scripture. She was the creation of the Old Testament and the creator of the New. This is why we have a problem with making the church after a presumed New Testament pattern. The ecclesia was created by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, and that community of believers over many decades produced the New Testament. But still her foundation is in the apostles and apostolic authority. This must be the meaning of "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone" in Eph. 2:19.

This means the church is founded upon the preaching of the gospel as first proclaimed by the apostles, and that her life and teaching is centered in the Scriptures given to us by the apostles and prophets. This is why we need no modern prophets and apostles in the superstructure, for the foundation has been laid once and for all. There is only one reason for modern apostles: so there might be modern revelations, crafted to fit a particular cult or sect. To say that the church is apostolic is to say it is founded upon the message of Scripture, and we need no more Bibles or additions to it.

These propositions get at the heart of the nature of the church, and they reflect the way the early Christians saw themselves. By the fourth century at the Council of Nicea the church framed a creedal statement: *We believe in the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church,* which reflects these principles. It is remarkable that the church came to the place in its then rather long history that it could capture the essence of its own being in one, short pregnant line.

It is crucial that we recover for the modern church this vital self-concept. We *are* united already, oneness being God's gift to the Body of Christ. We will therefore repudiate any divisiveness that would impose itself upon that oneness. We must again see ourselves as

God's holy temple, his dwelling place in this world, a "spiritual house" made so by the presence of the Holy Guest of heaven. Just so we must be intolerable of a "black church" or "white church," or "Southern" or "Northern," or oriental or occidental. If we think in terms of the church catholic we will not think primarily in terms of Texas or Tennessee, or Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Nashville, or Abilene.

Nor do we have to concern ourselves with the claims of cultic leaders or electric evangelists who have foundations of their own and who hear the voice of God as well as the apostles. We know that if any one builds a foundation other than that of the chosen Twelve, with Jesus Christ as the cornerstone, he builds in vain. Such cults and prophets have their day and pass on.

This is why we must be "people of the Book" with a greater sense of responsibility in interpreting and teaching the Scriptures. We can say in our day with a renewed devotion and urgency, *We believe in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.*

"God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his.'" (2 Tim. 2:19). That is image-making enough for the church in any generation: the ecclesia is God's firm foundation and while we may not, he always knows who and where that church is. —*the Editor*

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Travel Letter . . .

IMPRESSIONS FROM SOUTH AMERICA

If you read John Gunther's *Inside South America* back in the 1960's, you will remember that he laid on the reader many surprising facts about the continent underneath us, such as the eastern coast of South America being closer to Africa than to the eastern coast of the United States. And how Brazil, the largest of the ten independent nations of South America, is not only the fourth largest nation in the world but that it has two states within it that are larger than Texas. He also challenged the reader to name the one country on that continent whose language is not Spanish. But he was not referring to the three Guyannas, one of which is now called Surinam, where you have English, Dutch, and French spoken, side by side. Gunther charged that most Americans do not know that Brazil speaks Portugese.

That happens to be the thing that impresses me most in all my world travels, the confusion of tongues, which remains with me as a theological problem, one that I cannot solve simply by referring to the Old Testament story of the tower of Babel. Why would God, who has placed us in an environment that is increasingly becoming "a global village" and apparently destined to be "One World" (to quote Wendell Wilkie), fix it so that we cannot even talk to each other, except a rather small percentage of our fellow earthlings?

Since I am a "people person" and delight in being with people the world over, it frustrates me to sit beside someone on an airplane and not be able to communicate with him. I find myself, like Job, complaining to God, *Why did you do this to us?* Even if one learns several languages, he is still severely limited in his ability to communicate. I have flown with Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, Russians, Thais, Cambodians, Burmese, Vietnamese, to name a few that reside in only one part of the world, and not one of these, who live in approximation to each other can understand any of the others. Moreover, within these cultures there are hundreds of dialects that further compound the problem of communication. Many missionaries spend much of their time learning and translating these languages.

It also frustrates me to preach to foreigners through a translator, even though I have often done it. If the Holy Spirit bestows such a gift as foreign languages, apart from the long ordeal of learning them, I would desire such a gift. Think of it, being able to communicate in any tongue, language, or dialect anywhere in the world! I do not know of anyone who claims such a gift. Surely in heaven, or maybe even in the millennium, we will be able to understand each other in that there will be but one language. English of course!

In my travel diary of April 7, while flying PanAm from Miami to Buenos Aires (4,440 miles), I made a note of other things that impressed me. One was the crowded skies. The pilot explained that the rough ride was due to his not being able to go up to 37,000 feet — too crowded! Here we earthlings are, rising far above the snail-like pace of our forebears into the "far blue yonder" of apparent limitless space, and we are crowded!

I also made note of a phenomenon that persists in awing me: huge jets that carry hundreds of passengers to the other side of the world in a matter of hours. Our covered-wagon pioneers, who spent weeks going a few hundred miles, would view our way of life as a dream world. Such progress draws upon a great pool of knowledge that goes back to primitive man. Millions of people have contributed to what goes into the building of a giant jet airplane. No one man, and probably not even a thousand, could build such a

machine or have the knowhow, just as a few drops of water cannot account for an ocean. When those giant jets take off I am still like a child even though I have often experienced it. It remains unbelievable! But a friend of mine, the late Leonard Read, could be awed by things far humbler than a jumbo jet. He undertook to explore the intricacies of a simple wooden pencil that can be purchased for a dime. He at last wrote to Mr. Eberhardt of the pencil company by that name, who conceded that he had no one man or even a few men who knew all that was involved in manufacturing an item so "simple" as a yellow pencil. Whether it be a lowly pencil or a giant monarch of the sky I am not as yet prepared for the dictum of Sherlock Holmes, who could calmly insist, "Elementary, Watson, elementary!"

I also noted in my diary my impression of how difficult life remains in spite of all our advantages. Regardless of language, culture, or nationality human nature remains the same, as does sin. Man's problems are mostly of his own making, stemming from his own choices, and his life is not all that different whether he travels in a jet or in a gig. It is a fact that we are slow to accept, that life is difficult. I ventured the thought that every soul on that plane had a bundle of problems, and that if we had a way of exchanging our problems for someone else's we'd all be reluctant to do so, once we saw the magnitude of the other person's problems. Yet we seek to live life as if it were a dream. We do well if we can do as Oliver Wendell Holmes, the jurist who was the son of the poet, put it: "If we can but give the world a sample of our best."

I also reminded myself of how overwhelming mankind is in terms of sheer numbers. I have traversed the length of Mexico City, Tokyo, Buenos Aires — the world's largest cities — and it is the masses of people that impress me most. In a few more years these three cities alone will total upwards of 100 million souls! I took a lowly bus through the asphalt jungle of downtown Buenos Aires (but downtown is everywhere!), and having conned the driver into letting me sit up front beside him where I had a sort of balcony view, I marveled over the masses of people as we slowly wound our way through the narrow one-way streets. At one point we stopped alongside a pub with a completely open front. The sidewalk was so narrow that I could almost reach out and touch those who were sitting at the bar drinking. The driver got out and joined in the conversation for a time, so there I was a part of the pub. As I studied the crowd, all men, I thought of how we are all so much alike and yet so different, and how God knows the thoughts of everyone and loves every soul. In my childish way I sometimes wonder how he can keep up with them all!

On another occasion as I walked through a shopping area of Buenos Aires I asked the Church of Christ missionary who accompanied me, "Do we have to believe that the great masses of mankind, most of whom have had little opportunity to know God's truths, are

destined to spend an endless eternity in a devil's hell?" He seemed to consider the question reasonable, and he certainly did not contend that heaven will be restricted to members of Churches of Christ, who are something like one-hundredth of one-percent of the world's population.

My visit was primarily with Andrew and Kathleen Fuller, who are associated with the U.S. Embassy in Montevideo, Uruguay and longtime supporters of this journal. I. also visited with them two years ago in San Salvador in Central America. They arranged for me to speak at Christ's Church where they are members, a union church that can make claims of being simply Christian, and its services are in English. Once with this kind of church, people of our background can see the wisdom of this approach, which is *general* Christianity, with little emphasis given to any peculiar denominational doctrine. We studied the Scriptures together, preached the gospel, broke bread, and afterwards enjoyed social fellowship. In their case a distinction would have to be drawn between Christ's Church and the Church of Christ, the former in this case being strictly non-denominational.

The evening of the same Sunday I addressed through an interpreter a Christian Church mission congregation in a poor section of Montevideo on the beginnings of the Christian faith, all very simply set forth. They were responsive, with a lot of Spanish amens.

During the week I had lunch with a roomful of missionaries of several persuasions, including a number of Pentecostals, and I addressed them on "The Sun of Righteousness" in Mal. 4, which enabled me to draw distinctions between the various dispensations, a lesson I sometimes call Alexander Campbell's favorite. What I had to say was well received, especially by some of the Pentecostals, who were prepared to make bookings for me if and when I had the time.

The ecumenical gathering enabled me to meet an elegant British gentleman and his engaging wife, who had recently come from England to serve as rector of the Episcopal Church in that city. When we had dinner together at the Fuller home he related to us how he had installed a baptistery for "complete immersion," as he described it, in his church back home, for he found sprinkling to be an inadequate symbol. He told the touching story of how his parishioners were moved to tears when they witnessed for the first time the immersion of a dozen or so people, in what was probably the only such baptistery in all of British Anglicanism. This minister remains fixed in my heart as one of the humblest and committed Christians I have ever met, one wholly devoted to God's will.

If I were to go to South America on a permanent basis, my method would be as it was on this visit: *work within the existing structures.* It is both frustrating and futile to try to create a little ecclesiastical island known as "Church of Christ" or "Christian Church," which is the usual approach of our people, which largely separates them from the more effective missionary efforts. I would work among the Pentecostals, the Baptists, the Anglicans, and various non-denominational ministries such as the Full Gospel Men's Fellowship. But I would be my own man under God, always bearing witness to the truth as I understand it. I would work for renewal within the existing churches and for gospel outreach to the masses who are increasingly becoming pagan in spite of their Roman Catholic heritage.

In Buenos Aires I was with a young Christian Church missionary who has gone to that bewildering metropolis of eleven million people out of college. And is he expected to found a "Christian Church" after the order of those in the Midwest in that old Argentine culture that is as much European as it is Spanish? He is presently attending a Baptist Church where he is enlarging his circle of influence and hopes to serve Christ by reaching out to the masses through these believers. I commended him for his wisdom. My heart goes out to those missionaries who suppose they have to go it alone, a little island apart in an overwhelming sea. One such missionary in Buenos Aires meets with two Argentines each Lord's day. I hope he is not the kind that writes back home and says "We now have two Christians in Buenos Aires." But to be "supported" back home one usually has to be a sectarian even as a missionary.

My most delightful experience was to teach American history one evening to a class of college-age Uruguayans at a school conducted by the U.S. Information Agency, laid on me by folk at our Embassy. They were studying our Colonial history (in English), so I began to fire questions at them. They could name all twelve of the original colonies, and in order from north to south. They could tell me about both Plymouth and Jamestown, and with a little help they could distinguish between the Puritans and the Pilgrims. And they knew that the reason the Colonists came to the New World was more economic than it was religious, but they did not know about their rascality, such as the way they treated the Indians. The USIA text left that out! We talked about the Mayflower Compact, a little freedom document that anticipated the genius of the American republic. They even knew that Britishers sold themselves as indentured slaves in order to come to America, and once they had served their time many of them became rich and influential. Even waifs kidnaped from London streets by greedy sea captains eventually became builders of the new republic, as did some criminals who made the right choice when a British court would say "To prison or to America?"

But what interested them most was that I was from Texas, and like all foreigners they associated Dallas with the Kennedy assassination, but in their case not *Dallas*, which has not yet reached the TV screens in Uruguay, which is just as well.

My last night in that area (the two beautiful capitals, Montevideo and Buenos Aires are across a wide, wide river from each other) was in the home of Jacob and Marilyn Vincent, longtime readers of this journal, in Buenos Aires, who are beautiful bilingual, multi-cultured Christians and longtime missionaries. Jake and I tried to spot Halley's Comet late that night since we were in the right part of the world for it, but it was Marilyn, who stayed up longer, who said she saw something fuzzy. But Jake did show me the "Pink House," from the balcony of which dictator Juan Domingo Peron addressed his millions, yes *millions,* and from the roof of which his wife and successor, Eva, was whisked away by helicopter and held prisoner to her surprise. Politically, it has been touch and go for Argentina ever since, a common ailment among South American countries.

But Brazil is the country to watch, for it is destined to be a world power equal to Russia and the United States. So thinks an Embassy official with whom I visited. He also gave me his prescription for what ails South American countries. They must create a common market and allow for the competition and free enterprise that will allow the old family businesses to die. But most of all the *thinking* (or lack of it) of South Americans must change, and this will take an educational program extending for generations. Critical, analytical, innovative thinking is the only thing that will in time build political and economic stability.

Before I left Buenos Aires I was able to visit the Collecto Christianos, a handsome Church of Christ facility financed by American churches, where I met with a few missionaries, men and women, from Christian Churches as well as Churches of Christ. Contact between such missionaries has thus far been negligible. In such places one finds able, dedicated people who seem to be confronted with an impossible task. I asked one missionary what methods had he found effective. He had not found any effective methods.

But there are the Mormons with many churches in the area and an elegant temple in Buenos Aires, lighted by night and graced by the angel Moroni himself — and not a Salamander! So I suppose it is a question of what one wants for South America and the world.

The “Boston Church” Church of Christ missionaries will soon be arriving in Buenos Aires with their “Crossroads” methods, which have won thousands in Boston and already hundreds in London and Paris. They’ll show them how to do it! But it will not likely be the method used by that Christian Church brother, who moves among the denominations already there, the Baptists in particular, and says, “Let’s do it together for Jesus’ sake.” — *the Editor*

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ALEXANDER CAMPBELL’S FINEST HOUR

While there were of course many august moments in the illustrious life of Alexander Campbell, I would select one of his speeches in his debate with Robert Owen the infidel as his finest hour. At 41 he was in his prime and at his very best. The movement he had launched was enjoying phenomenal growth, and its influence had reached other continents. And yet this debate with a renowned socialist was to send Campbell’s star to even greater heights. Nonetheless, he was a man smitten by tragedy, rejection, and persecution. Already he had buried three of his little children, and only recently he had laid his beloved wife Margaret in her grave. And now he faced his greatest test against atheism and secularism as believers from many churches looked to him as a defender of the faith. The year was 1829. With this background it is reassuring to see what he conceived as the real issue in the debate. His biographer writes of the effect of this speech: “All fears were banished, and the unbidden tear was seen to trickle from many eyes.”

It is not the ordinary affairs of this life, the fleeting and transitory concerns of today or tomorrow; it is not whether we shall live all freemen, or die all slaves; it is not the momentary affairs of empire, or the evanescent charms of dominion — nay, indeed, all these are but the toys of childhood, the sportive excursions of youthful fancy, contrasted with the question, *What is man? Whence came he? Whither does he go?* Is he a mortal or an immortal being? Is he doomed to spring up like the grass, bloom like a flower, drop his seed into the earth, and die forever? Is there no object of future hope? No God no heaven — no exalted society to be known or enjoyed? Are all the great and illustrious men and women who have lived before we’re born, wasted and gone forever? After a few short days are fled, when the enjoyments and toils of life are over; when our relish for social enjoyment, and our desires for returning to the fountain of life are most acute, must we hang our heads and close our eyes in the desolating and appalling prospect of never opening them again, of never tasting the sweets for which a state of discipline and trial has

so well fitted us? These are the awful and sublime merits of the question at issue. It is not what we shall eat, nor what we shall drink, unless we shall be proved to be mere animals; but it is, shall we live or die forever? It is as beautifully expressed by a Christian poet —

Shall spring ever visit the mouldering urn?
Shall day ever dawn on the night of the grave?

—*Campbell-Owen Debate*, p. 13

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JESUS CHRIST: WORD OF GOD

By Mark Berrier

In my first article Word of God was identified as existing in five dimensions: (1) Jesus Christ, (2) preaching and teaching of the apostles and prophets, (3) Scripture, (4) in nature, and (5) in me. Forthcoming articles will deal with each these five individually.

1. *Jesus is Word of God in Creation*

Jesus Christ is Word of God in a unique sense. Technically, the best translation of John 1:1 is as follows: “At first was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was what God was.” The New English Bible concludes the verse with. “. . . what God was, the Word was.”, which captures the meaning of the phrase in the original. This improved translation is important because “The Word was God” implies equality between the Word and God, as though one could also say, “If the word was God, then God was the Word.” But this is not the intent of the author of John 1:1, anymore than “God is love” in 1 Jn. 4:8 means “Love is God.” John 1:1 is similar to John 14:9 and 28: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father,” and “the Father is greater than I am.” In other words, Jesus prayed to “Someone,” and he later sent “Someone” to the Church. He is God, but he is not all of God! He is, in his very essence what God is in his very essence, but he is Son, while there are also Father and Spirit, yet they are one.

This concept of oneness (yet separate personhood) is seen in other passages. Ps. 110:1 says: “The LORD says to my Lord: Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.” Both the one speaking and the one spoken to are designated by the same English word, but note that the first “LORD” is capitalized throughout, while the other is “Lord.” This designates two different Hebrew words, the one being Yahweh

(LORD) and the other *Adonai* (Lord). The first is God's personal name, "The self-existing one," and the other denotes "Messiah," the human figure of God. (cf. Matt. 22:41-46). Isa. 63:7-19 designates God as *Father* or (LORD) (verse 16), as Holy Spirit of the LORD (verse 10 and 14) and as the *Savior* who is the "angel of his presence" (verse 8 and 9: literal translation is "the messenger of God's face"). See also Isa. 6:1 and 3.

When we go from John 1 to Genesis 1, we still see the Word in the creative process:

1:1 — God created. …
1:1 — the Spirit was hovering. …
1:3 — And God said. …

In verse one is *Elohim,* a plural name for God the Creator; in verse two his Spirit is at work to bring order out of chaos; in verse three the Word is spoken. In fact, all God's creative acts in Genesis 1 are prefaced by the phrase, "And God said."

The following analogy may be of some help: It is I who speak. When I speak I must previously draw a breath. When I speak the breath is formed by the words of my mouth. In this process there are: I, my breath, my words, a "trinity." I (like the Father) determine when I breathe (like the Spirit) and what my words are (like the Son). My words express, through my breath, what I actually am, but my word is not all of me, nor is my breath (Spirit) limited to my speaking. In the same way, there is the Father who speaks in the Son, who, in turn, pours out the Spirit.

The early fathers of the Church, when seeking to explain the relationship between God and the Word, frequently turned to the wisdom passage in Proverbs 8:22ff. There, Wisdom, which they equate with Christ, says, "The LORD possessed me, a beginning of his way, before his works from eternity" (v. 22). And Wisdom says (v. 30), "Then I was the craftsman at his side . . . rejoicing always in his presence. . . ." The word "craftsman" can also be translated, as it is in many of the ancient versions, "foster son" (!), even though the Hebrew word "wisdom" is a feminine word. Webster says that a foster son has a ". . . specified standing in a family, but not by birth." This is a perfect description of Jesus. God's Word (God's Wisdom), God's Son *is* special, but not only by his birth! He is special because of who he is, the one who upholds the universe by his spoken word, because it is he who put it all together (Heb. 1:2, 11:3).

2. *Jesus is Word of God in Redemption*

Now we move from the theological and universal to the practical and particular.

> The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
>
> No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (Jn. 1:14, 18)

This last phrase, "has made him known", is essential in our understanding of God's word in redemption. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." The Christ's mission was to show us God. In fact, "made him known" in John 1:18 is actually a translation of *exegesato* — "he exegeted him." Literally, Jesus led God out where he can clearly be seen. He says, "These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me," (John 14:24) and "Many great works I have shown you from the Father" (John 10:32). Thus, in God's "enfleshment," Jesus speaks his Father's words and does his Father's works. This was the Son's purpose. Christ is, therefore, the embodiment of God's message to the world.

The writer of Hebrews inserts a classic statement about the Word of God between a discussion of the "Sabbath Rest" and "Jesus the Great High Priest."

> For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Heb. 4:11-13)

Here, this living, active, sharp word is seen as penetrating into men's inner beings, sharper than the sacrificial dagger which split the animals in half, slicing through every layer of our lives. Though that word entered Israel's hearts, they refused to obey and enter God's rest (Heb. 4:2). Now this word still penetrates into our hearts, judging thoughts and attitudes. Only God's living Word is capable of doing an accurate critique of the heart, as Jer. 11:20 and Ps. 139:23 indicate. Nothing can be hidden from his eyes; he splits us open and strips us naked, knowing all of us in every part. "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me!" Why does he want to know us so intimately? What is the reason for such complete knowledge? So that, as our High Priest, he may *forgive* us of all we are and think and do. What a wonderful Word he is!

What we can see in Christ — his love and compassion toward people, his healing of the sick — this is God's will for all. However, his will is also that "no one should perish" (2 Peter 3:9), but not all men will come to repentance. What we see in Christ should now be in *us*, since "in this world we are like him." (1 John 4:17)

Redemption is the work of Christ, buying us back from the world and sin, transferring us from darkness into the Kingdom of Light. He spoke God's words; he did God's works; he redeemed us from our slavery. This is God's word and God's work: Jesus Christ came to save sinners!

3. *Jesus Christ is Word of God in Judgement*

At the end, at the last trumpet, Jesus Christ comes to judge as Word of God.

> I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing of fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and his name is the Word of God. (Rev. 19:11-13)

The Word of God, the Rider on the horse, is Creator and Redeemer; it is therefore fitting that he should be judge. It is he who, by the very expression of God, created all reality. Then he came as God's messenger to interpret all reality and to disclose what is *real*. Now he comes as Word of God to judge all the earth by the words he spoke. But we are not afraid, for "We Know that we have passed out of death and into life, because we love our brothers." (1 John 3:14) Jesus, God's living Word, has told us, "The one hearing my word and believing the One who sent me has eternal life and is not coming into judgement, but he has passed out of death and into life. (John 5:24) — *Dallas Christian College, 2700 Christian Pkwy, Dallas, Tx 75234*

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OUR CHANGING WORLD

A recent bulletin of the Friendswood Church of Christ near Houston carried a statement from the elders as to the way they view their minister, who is Gary Taliaferro. He is first an equipper and trainer of the members; secondly, he is an evangelist in the

community; thirdly, a counselor within the membership, the community, and the school. It is especially significant that the minister is seen as an equipper , which has the ring of Eph. 4:11-13 to it. If this concept were taken seriously by our people, we would soon have congregations so involved in Body life that the preachers would be free to do the work of an evangelist. The system we now practice largely makes spectators of most of our members.

A number of leaders from the black Churches of Christ met in Miami recently to discuss whether they were the only Christians or Christians only. The reason for the gathering is that there is a substantial effort being made to liberalize the hard-line position that these churches have always taken. The “somewhats” gathered to address the problem, score what they consider false doctrine, and even to withdraw fellowship from the leader or leaders of the more open persuasion. The only white brethren on the program were Ira Rice and Leroy Garrett. We plan to give an extensive report of this stormy event in our next issue.

The day I write these lines is Ouida’s mother’s 90th birthday anniversary. She has now been in our home four years, and while she becomes more senile she is the same beautiful person that I have now known for 44 years. While frailty confines Mother Pitts to her room much of the time, she is frequently at her place at our table. I read to her almost daily and through the years have read much of Barclay’s *Daily Bible Study* to her, which she is able to appreciate. Ouida is of course very attentive to her, even in the night watches, a ministry that largely confines Ouida to her home, which she lovingly accepts. I assure her that the Lord will use this to prepare her for something special when our pilgrimage here is over. When we hear Mother Pitts calling Ouida on the intercom in the wee hours, not unlike the cries of a child for its mother, I am reminded of how the mother-child relationship can be reversed, one of the tragic turns that life takes. God in his mercy adds the touch of senility so as to make it bearable to the aged one. I have also been made aware of what is increasingly the case in America, that it is the old who take care of the old. And there is no way to forget the wisdom of Shakespeare, who spoke of most of us when he wrote, “Once a man, twice a child.” But I have long since quit trying to understand life. I just try to live it.

J. James Albert, in his little *California Letter* (Box 811, Corcoran, CA 93212), which I read assiduously, recently wrote to one of his critics, who insists on divorcing himself from his Restoration heritage, of his own view of our history: “I do trace my heritage to Campbell, Stone, et al. We owe a debt of gratitude to those men for starting the Restoration Movement, and for ferreting many truths from the Scriptures for our use. I hope it is not

true of you, but often when our people deny their heritage they can't stand the light of the truths discovered by those pioneers. They abandon restoration principles because they serve to indict their sectarian teachings and practices."

Crisis in Church of Christ Polity

I recently attended a meeting of Church of Christ ministers in Dallas in which a lawyer gave a lengthy report on the several litigation cases across the country, from Florida to California, involving Churches of Christ. Most of these cases have to do with the role of elders and the general question of authority in a Church of Christ.

While the lawyer, himself a member of the Church of Christ, did not use the word crisis, he indicated that the church is destined to face some difficult times if it cannot find a more workable form of church government. Even during this meeting a call came to the lawyer informing him of a U. S. Supreme Court decision relative to a Church of Christ in Florida. The Court upheld a lower court's ruling that in these four areas an eldership cannot act arbitrarily but must consult the congregation: (1) in the control of property, (2) in the handling of finances, (3) in the hiring of personnel, (4) in the selection or election of elders. In the Florida case the congregation, amidst a prolonged dispute, voted the elders out of office. The elders sued, claiming their authority precluded such action. The courts upheld the congregation.

In legal terms this is the issue: *Is the Church of Christ congregational or hierarchical in government?* The law recognizes no other options. Our churches must answer this question without equivocation, not only in view of possible lawsuits but for their own understanding as to who they are and how they do things. While all these years we have insisted that we are congregational, we have leaders among us who are prepared to testify in court that in terms of the eldership we are hierarchical, which means that the final authority is with the elders.

The classic example of hierarchical polity is the Roman Catholic Church, where the pope elects the cardinals and the cardinals elect the pope. The lowly member of a Roman Catholic congregation has no voice whatever as to who serves as parish priest, has no control of the church's property or funds. The bishop is the absolute authority, and above him is the archbishop, the cardinals, and finally the pope. Do we in Churches of Christ have anything like that in our local congregations? If the "eldership" has the final say, with no recourse on the part of the congregation, in reference to finances, property, hiring and firing the preacher, and even selecting other elders, creating a self-perpetuating board, then we have something akin to Roman Catholic polity.

The Methodist Church is also hierarchical in that it is ruled by bishops, who can do as they please, apart from the will of the congregation. A local Methodist Church is owned by the Conference, which is ruled by bishops, so that the people themselves have no control of the property they paid for, and once the money is deposited in the bank it belongs to "the Church," not to the local people. Is the Church of Christ like this? Or are we congregational, which means that the *final* authority lies in the congregation itself?

From the days of Stone and Campbell our people have believed: (l) the people elect the elders in some manner, not the elders; (2) the people can remove a sitting elder if need be; (3) the elders are to consult the congregation in the decision-making process and are not to rule arbitrarily or dogmatically; (4) the property belongs to the people, not the elders; (5) the congregation has the right to be informed as to how money is spent and has a voice in how it is spent.

The present crisis exists because we have allowed these democratic values to slip from us. In ensuing essays we intend to enlarge upon these concepts, both from the Scriptures and from our leading thinkers through the years, so that we might see what Churches of Christ are supposed to be. — *The Editor*

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BOOK NOTES

When we first announced Amy Grant's *Heart to Heart Bible Stories* a few months back, the reception was positive. We have a new supply at $9.95 postpaid. The stories have a special touch and are truly heart to heart. The Feeding of the Multitude becomes "A Big Picnic" and the Hebrew flight from Egypt is "Journey to Freedom," and you'll recognize "Lions in the Night" and "The Widow's Jar." It is enriched with colorful illustrations, and Amy is on the cover with children about her.

The Bible Speaks to You by Robert McAfee Brown is a very resourceful volume, rich in information about the Bible and scores of questions related to Bible study, such as *Why* is *there evil?, Why did people want to kill Jesus?, What happens when I die?* As revealing as any topic is on the nature of the Bible itself. $9.50 postpaid.

Michael Green's *The Day Death Died* gets to the heart of the transforming power of the gospel message. He shows how much is settled for us in both time and eternity if Jesus is the risen Christ. $3.75 postpaid.

Robert H. Schuller may not be everyone's hero, but he says a lot of good things in his books, which have a way of making the bestseller lists. His *Tough Times Never Last, But Tough People Do!* will encourage you and we can send a copy for $6.50 postpaid. His latest volume, *The Be (Happy) Attitudes* sets forth eight positive attitudes, based on Jesus' beatitudes, that he says will change your life. $12.95 postpaid.

You will find Bruce Parmenter one of the best writers among Churches of Christ-Christian Churches, and his *What the Bible Says About Self-Esteem,* which is part of a series published by College Press, is really good stuff. The book is hardly titled correctly since it is really 373 pages of rich devotional studies, short, resourceful, inspiring. Ideal for personal devotions or family table readings. Each devotional has a well-chosen memory verse. We highly recommend this book at 13.95 in hardback, postpaid.

We have two specials going that may interest you. You can still get a free copy ($21.95 retail value) of *The Stone-Campbell Movement* by Leroy Garrett when you send us eight subs to this paper, new or renewal, including your own, at $3.00 per name, total $24.00. You must request the book when you submit the list. We are also offering all five of our available bound volumes, inclusive of seven years of *Restoration Review* for only $35.00. These are all hardbound, matching volumes, with dust jackets, beautifully bound.

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You can send this paper to others for only $3.00 per year for each name in clubs of four or more. We do the mailing from this office. If you prefer a bundle to be sent to your home, the rate is the same. Some of our most grateful readers discovered us through the kind offices of such a friend. When you renew your sub, you can add three names, all for only $12.00. It may prove to be an important way to reach out to others.

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READERS' EXCHANGE

We have been meeting for some time in my home as a free Church of Christ. Others within driving distance are certainly welcome. We meet at 10:30 Lord's Day morning. — *Lowell Cook, 1804* S. *Sycamore, Palestine, TX 75801.*

We are caring for five orphans in our home. As soon as there are funds we shall start a permanent building. Can you or your church come into partnership with us in this work? Can you kindly recommend this work to other brethren who can help? — *Ernest Udom, Box 1710, Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria, West Africa*

Second Class postal rates are now 40 percent higher than in December 1985. *Newslog,* Associated Church Press

Even though postal rates continue to climb, even to incredible levels, which makes it difficult for publications like this one, we are hopeful of keeping our sub rates at present levels. — *Ed.*)

Even though I am no longer a member of the 6th and Izard Church of Christ, I am still vitally interested in what happens to the remaining members of that congregation. Because of what I could see was taking place there, I decided to leave and go, instead, to the First Christian Church on Mississippi Avenue. Until now, I have remained silent about the reasons for leaving, but the enclosed article by Brother Leroy Garrett, Editor of *Restoration Review,* best describes why I finally decided to leave. — *Clint McDonald, Little Rock, AR*

(This brother mailed the article "Freedom Riders in Little Rock," which appeared in the February issue of this journal, along with a letter, quoted in part here, to the members of the church he had left. It is not our intention to encourage our concerned but frustrated members to leave the Church of Christ but to stay and take a stand for "the glorious liberty of the sons of God," which was the point of the article referred to. But I realize that the reasons for staying with the Church of Christ are sometimes the reasons for leaving, so each of us must march by the drumbeat that he hears. I would only remind our people who long for change that as a rule changes are wrought from within more than from without. And the ruling precept for us all is that *Love suffers long,* which we can see perfectly and gloriously in Him whose we are and whom we serve. — *Ed.*)

We are now working much harder than for several years. Much of it is manual labor and we get so tired we can hardly walk. Last Thursday Nell gave away 51 blankets, 10 pillows, a great many groceries, 23 women's winter coats. We also provided a number of men's lined jackets and 11 pairs of shoes. The people took about 200 garments from the racks. All of this has to be sorted out, separated and straightened up when they leave. We were open from 9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. for give aways on Wednesday and Thursday.

Fortunately I am free from cutting grass, shoveling snow, and general upkeep since we are in an apartment, but I notice one thing. We are almost completely isolated from brotherhood hassles and squabbles. I am talking with and counseling alcoholics, drug users and people with marriage problems. — *Carl Ketcherside, St. Louis MO*

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